

## 29. The Birth of Our Lord Jesus.

6th June 1944 I still see the inside of the poor stony shelter, where Mary and Joseph have found refuge, sharing the lot of some animals.

The little fire is dozing together with its guardian. Mary lifts Her head slowly from Her bed and looks round. She sees that Joseph's head is bowed over his chest, as if he were meditating, and She thinks that his good intention to remain awake has been overcome by tiredness. She smiles lovingly and making less noise than a butterfly alighting on a rose, She sits up and then goes on Her knees. She prays with a blissful smile on Her face. She prays with Her arms stretched out, almost in the shape of a cross, with the palms of Her hands facing up and forward, and She never seems to tire in that position. She then prostrates Herself with Her face on the hay, in an even more ardent prayer. A long prayer.

Joseph rouses. He notices that the fire is almost out and the stable almost dark. He throws a handful of very slender heath on to the fire and the flames are revived, he then adds some thicker twigs and finally some sticks, because the cold is really biting: the cold of a serene winter night that comes into the ruins from everywhere. Poor Joseph must be frozen sitting as he is near the door, if we can call a door the hole where Joseph's mantle serves as a curtain. He warms his hands near the fire, then takes his sandals off and warms his feet. When the fire is gaily blazing and its light is steady, he turns round. But he does not see anything, not even Mary's white veil that formed a clear line on the dark hay. He gets up and slowly moves towards Her pallet.

« Are You not sleeping, Mary? » he asks.

He asks Her three times until She turns round and replies: « I am praying. » « Is there anything you need? »

« No, Joseph. »

« Try and sleep a little. At least try and rest. »

« I will try. But I don't get tired praying. »

« God be with You, Mary. »

« And with you, Joseph. »

Mary resumes Her position. Joseph to avoid falling asleep, goes on his knees near the fire and prays. He prays with his hands pressed against his face. He removes them now and again to feed the fire and then he resumes his ardent prayer. Apart from the noise of the crackling sticks and the noise made now and again by the donkey stamping its hooves on the ground, no other sound is heard.

A thin ray of moonlight creeps in through a crack in the vault and it seems a blade of unearthly silver looking for Mary. It stretches in length as the moon climbs higher in the sky and at last reaches Her. It is now on Her head, where it forms a halo of pure light.

Mary lifts Her head, as if She had a celestial call, and She gets up and goes on to Her knees again. Oh! How beautiful it is here now! She raises Her head, and Her face shines in the white moonlight and becomes transfigured by a supernatural smile. What does She see? What does She hear? What does She feel? She is the only one who can tell what She saw, heard and felt in the refulgent hour of Her Maternity. I can only see that the light around Her is increasing more and more. It seems to come down from Heaven, to arise from the poor things around Her, above all it seems to originate from Herself.

Her deep blue dress now seems of a pale myosotis blue, and Her hands and face are becoming clear blue as if they were placed under the glare of a huge pale sapphire. This hue is spreading more and more on the things around Her, it covers them, purifies them and brightens

everything. It reminds me, although it is somewhat softer, of the hue I see in the vision of holy Paradise, and also of the colour I saw in the visit of the Wise Men.

The light is given off more and more intensely from Mary's body, it absorbs the moonlight. She seems to be drawing to Herself all the light that can descend from Heaven. She is now the Depository of the Light. She is to give this Light to the world. And this blissful, uncontainable, immeasurable, eternal, divine Light which is about to be given, is heralded by a dawn, a morning star, a chorus of atoms of Light that increase continuously like a tide, and rise more and more like incense, and descend like a large stream and stretch out like veils...

The vault, full of crevices, of cobwebs, of protruding rubble balanced by a miracle of physics, the dark, smokey repellent vault, now seems the ceiling of a royal hall. Each boulder is a block of silver, each crack an opal flash, each cobweb a most precious canopy interwoven with silver and diamonds. A huge green lizard, hibernating between two stones, seems an emerald jewel forgotten there by a queen: and a bunch of hibernating bats is like a precious onyx chandelier. The hay from the upper manger is no longer grass blades: it is pure silver wires quivering in the air with the grace of loose hair.

The dark wood of the lower manger is a block of burnished silver. The walls are covered with a brocade in which the white silk disappears under the pearly embroidery of the relief, and the soil... what is the soil now? It is a crystal lit tip by a white light. Its protrusions are like roses thrown in homage of the soil; the holes are precious cups from which perfumes and scents are to arise.

And the light increases more and more. It is now unbearable to the eye. And the Virgin disappears in so much light, as if She had been absorbed by an incandescent curtain...and the Mother emerges.

Yes. When the light becomes endurable once again to my eyes, I see Mary with the new-born Son in Her arms. A little Baby, rosy and plump, bustling with His little hands as big as rose buds and kicking with His tiny feet that could be contained in the hollow of the heart of a rose: and is crying with a thin trembling voice, just like a new-born little lamb, opening His pretty little mouth that resembles a wild strawberry, and showing a tiny tongue that trembles against the rosy roof of His mouth. And He moves His little head that is so blond that it seems without any hair, a little round head that His Mummy holds in the hollow of Her hand, while She looks at Her Baby and adores Him weeping and smiling at the same time, and She bends down to kiss Him not on His innocent head, but on the centre of His chest, where underneath there is His little heart beating for us... where one day there will be the Wound. And His Mother is doctoring that wound in advance, with Her immaculate kiss.

The ox, woken up by the dazzling light, gets up with a great noise of hooves and bellows, the donkey turns its head round and brays. It is the light that rouses them but I love to think that they wanted to greet their Creator, both for themselves and on behalf of all the animals.

Also Joseph, who almost enraptured, was praying so ardently as to be isolated from what was around him, now rouses and he sees a strange light filter through the fingers of his hands pressed against his face. He removes his hands, lifts his head and turns round. The ox, standing as it is, hides Mary. But She calls him: « Joseph, come. »

Joseph rushes. And when he sees, he stops, struck by reverence, and he is about to fall on his knees where he is. But Mary insists: « Come, Joseph » and She leans on the hay with Her left hand and, holding the Child close to Her heart with Her right one, She gets up and moves towards Joseph, who is walking embarrassed, because of a conflict in him between his desire to go and his fear of being irreverent.

They meet at the foot of the straw bed and they look at each other, weeping blissfully. « Come, let us offer Jesus to the Father » says Mary. And while Joseph kneels down, She stands up between two trunks supporting the vault, She lifts up Her Creature in Her arms and says: « Here I am. On His behalf, O God, I speak these words to You: here I am to do Your will. And I, Mary, and My spouse, Joseph, with Him. Here are Your servants, O Lord. May Your will always be done by us, in every hour, in every event, for Your glory and Your love. »

Then Mary bends down and says: « Here, Joseph, take Him », and offers him the Child. « What! I?... Me?... Oh, no! I am not worthy! » Joseph is utterly dumbfounded at the idea of having to touch God. But Mary insists smiling: « You are well worthy. No one is more worthy than you are, and that is why the Most High chose you. Take Him, Joseph, and hold Him while I look for the linens. »

Joseph, blushing almost purple, stretches his arms out and takes the Baby, Who is screaming because of the cold and when he has Him in his arms, he no longer persists in the intention of holding Him far from himself, out of respect, but he presses Him to his heart and bursts into tears exclaiming: « Oh! Lord! My God! » And he bends down to kiss His tiny feet and feels them cold. He then sits on the ground, and holds Him close to his chest and with his brown tunic and his hands he tries to cover Him, and warm Him, defending Him from the bitterly cold wind of the night. He would like to go near the fire, but there is a cold draft there coming in from the door. It is better to stay where he is. No, it is better to go between the two animals which serve as a protection against the air and give out warmth. Thus, he goes between the ox and the donkey, with his back to the door, bending over the New-Born to form with his body a shelter, the two sides of which are a grey head with long ears, and a huge white muzzle with a steaming nose and two gentle soft eyes.

Mary has opened the trunk and has pulled out the linens and swaddling clothes. She has been near the fire warming them. She now moves towards Joseph and envelops the Baby with lukewarm linen and then with Her veil to protect His little head. « Where shall we put Him now? » She asks.

Joseph looks round, thinking... « Wait » he says. « Let us move the animals and their hay over here, we will then pull down that hay up there and arrange it in here. The wood on the side will protect Him from the air, the hay will serve as a pillow and the ox will warm Him a little with its breath. The ox is better than the donkey. It is more patient and quiet. » And he bustles about, while Mary is lulling the Baby, holding Him close to Her heart, and laying Her cheek on His tiny head to warm it.

Joseph makes up the fire, without economy this time, to have a good blaze, and he warms the hay and as it dries up, he keeps it near his chest, so that it will not get cold. Then, when he has gathered enough to make a little mattress for the Child, he goes to the manger and sorts it out as if it were a cradle. « It is ready » he says. « Now we would need a blanket, because the hay stings, and also to cover Him. »

« Take My mantle » says Mary.

« You will be cold. »

« Oh! It does not matter! The blanket is too coarse. The mantle is soft and warm. I am not cold at all. Don't let Him suffer any longer! »

Joseph takes the wide mantle of soft dark blue wool, he double folds it and lays it on the hay, leaving a strip hanging out of the manger. The first bed for the Saviour is ready.

And the Mother, with Her sweet, graceful gait, moves to the manger, lays Him in it, and covers Him with the strip of Her mantle. She arranges it also around His bare head, almost

completely covered by the hay, from which it is protected only by Mary's thin veil. Only His little face, the size of a man's fist, is left uncovered. Mary and Joseph, bending over the manger, are blissfully happy watching Him sleep His first sleep, because the warmth of the clothes and of the hay has appeased His crying, and made Him sleepy.

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